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CRUCIBLE OF CONFLICT

Frank Waters

FROM THIS TINY LOG CABIN in a meadow among the pines, on the high slope of Lobo Mountain in the Sangre de Cristos of northern New Mexico, we stare down upon one of the most beautiful, paradoxical, and significant panoramas in the world today.

The tall dark pines marching down through sage and chamisa to the rugged plateau below. The Rio Grande patiently gnawing through its rocky gorge. The empty desert shimmering beyond. And farther, the distant Jemez Range lifting like the upturned edge of the horizon. All, mountain, plateau, and desert, seeming to comprise within one vast frame a world of pristine purity untouched by man.

But when we crawl down the rutted, rocky road all this beauty becomes an illusion. Its unbroken serenity is dispelled. The land is in travail. There is a schism in the soul of man. It is a vast battleground, perhaps the last, for the forces of man and nature, of past and future, of the cosmic dualities of the universe.

Below the gorge sprawl the sleepy little adobe villages of Pilar, Velarde, and Embudo settled by Spanish-Colonials from Mexico three centuries ago. . . . There bustles and rattles modern Anglo-American Riverside where the *deus ex machina* is the soul of progress—the omnipotent *máquina* which is a radio replacing the guitar, a reaper doing the work of the scythe, or the Ford driving the burro off the road. . . . Hidden by old cottonwoods are the ancient Indian pueblos of San Juan, Santa Clara, and San Ildefonso; rhythmically pulsing to the low beat of drums while men, naked and painted, file out of the sacred kivas to dance in the dusty plazas. . . . Dancing as men danced in the still more ancient cities that stood here before Columbus came; in the pre-historic cliff cities of Puyé and Rito de los Frijoles of the Pajarito Pla-

teau in the Jemez Mountains rising just above. . . . South in the Sandia Mountains near Albuquerque lies the cave in which an expedition from the University of New Mexico discovered the remains of what might be the earliest known man on the continent—the Sandia Man who lived 25,000 years ago. . . . North toward Abiquiu on Arthur Pack's Ghost Ranch paleontologists are now digging up the 200-million-year-old bones of small kangaroo-size dinosaurs antedating the gigantic Brontosaurus. . . . When suddenly a new road twists upward to a high shelf in the mountains above. Past armed MP's. Into a roaring settlement that is at once a frontier town, a boom mining camp, a construction camp and an army post. Roads crowded with trucks and tractors. Streets lined with auto-trailers, plank shanties, and barracks. No sidewalks, no hotels nor restaurants, no shops. But a drug store in a log cabin, an army commissary, a movie house with a tin roof. All clustered around a huge lodge of weathered logs that once was the boy's summer school of Los Alamos. Now The Hill, the Forbidden City of Atomic Research.

Perhaps in no other comparable area on earth are condensed so many contradictions, or manifested so clearly the opposite polarities of life itself. The oldest cities in America and the newest. The Indian drum and the atom smasher. Men invoking with prayerful rhythm the magic of pure feeling; and men evolving the new magic of atomic fission by the rational principles of ultra-modern science. The aristocracy of the humble, and the vulgarity of the proud. The white and dark races, the defeated minority. The oldest life forms discovered on this continent, and the newest universal agent of mass death.

It is an amazing coincidence, a monstrous jigsaw puzzle of irreconcilable differences. All within a stone's throw, bound within two mountain walls and divided by a river. And maintaining at safe perspective the illusion of tranquility.

Such is the valley of the north Rio Grande, and it is the world as well. A world standing on the threshold of a new age, but torn by a conflict between two principles—two opposites of nature—that must be understood and finally resolved.

Summer before last this writer submitted to the annual New Mexico issue of the *Southwest Review*, a short and simple article which attempted to equate the significance of ancient man's intuitive ceremonial magic and modern man's rational magic of atomic fission.

Surprisingly, it was printed as the leading article. More surprising

were the letters that came in about it—mainly letters of protest against its “far-fetched literary allusions,” its “pleasantly poetic but logically dubious assumptions,” the very use of the word “magic.” What else was it all but mere coincidence? Of what possible importance to anybody was the fact that within twenty miles of each other men were dancing for rain and others were splitting the atom? How could there be any relationship whatever between the ancient ceremonialism of Rito de los Frijoles and San Ildefonso, and the nuclear physics of Alamosgordo and Los Alamos?

The best of these critical letters, an excellent one from a poet and another from a scientist at the Los Alamos Research Laboratory, together with the original article and a second one answering them, were published serially on the editorial pages of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. These were followed by a long, commendable editorial summarizing the series and ending the controversy.

The only conclusions to be drawn from this tempest in a tea-cup were obvious. Our surprising interest as a practical people in such a nebulous subject. And our more surprising ignorance of the meaning of Indian ceremonialism after centuries of observation, and of the meaning of atomic fission which ushers all mankind into a new historic era.

The mechanics of both are diversified scientific arts intelligible only to the few; they lie in the realm of rational investigation—of ethnology and archaeology, physics and chemistry. Their meanings are pertinent to us all. But they lie within the limits of metaphysics, mysticism, religion, intuition, perception, a moral and psychological reality—whatever we choose to call it—whose validity we refuse to admit. Why?

Man everywhere has always recognized two opposite poles of man's nature, the duality of life itself.

The ancient Chinese named these two principles Yin and Yang. Yin, meaning shadow, the north side of a mountain and the shadowy south side of a river, stood for all that was dark and unconscious in man—his passive, feminine nature, his emotional depths, the realm of the intuition. Yang, its polar opposite, the south side of a mountain and the sunny north side of a river, designated his light, conscious nature—the active, masculine self, with its rational mind.

Plato in his philosophy postulated the same two general “ground principles”—the rational, mathematical, male principle, and the feminine, intuitive, emotional principle.

We today accept these fundamental approaches to the meaning of life, these components of life itself, under such names as F. S. C. Northrop's "undifferentiated aesthetic component" and "determinate theoretic component."

Primarily we feel, believe, divine. Or we think, know, prove.

So quite naturally, in the slow but ceaseless evolution of mankind, man has swung alternately from one pole to the other of this duality. We have had many times an Age of Faith, an Age of Reason. And at the same time there have been cultures, peoples, whole civilizations adhering mainly to one principle or the other.

The dark races immemorially have clung to one, the white to another. The ancient civilizations of America, the Pueblo, Mexic, and Maya, as well as the ancient civilizations of Asia, of India and China, were built upon the instinctual and intuitional approach. So, too, were their remnants and successors; the surviving little city-states of the Pueblo Indians, Mexico, and the countries of Latin America, and the modern civilizations of the Orient.

The modern Euro-American civilization, conversely, stands upon the rationalistic approach. Heraclitus declared the very air was full of reason for man to breathe. Socrates believed in the rational control of impulses and feelings. The great Roman Empire was founded upon a passion for the orderly arrangement of facts, and maintained by Roman Law which still dominates juridical thought, the most enduring product of classical rationalization. In 1793 there was inaugurated in Paris a festival of the "Goddess of Reason" in Notre Dame Cathedral. Man had begun to reason even in religion.

The civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome have perished. Europe has crumbled. And today our America is their successor. America is a peculiarly modern country. Without roots in its own ancient past, all its cultural traditions spring from Europe. But its umbilical cord with it has been cut. We are wholly the product of our own machine-made culture.

Where do we stand today?

America now sustains the world. Upon her full granaries the starving populations of Europe depend. Her political intercession is relied upon to lend stability to the new governments of Germany and Japan. Her diplomacy helps to shape the emerging governments of Greece, Korea, and China. Her financial support bolsters up the tottering British Empire. Twenty countries in Latin America depend on

her aid against possible aggression. A great merchant marine, carrying her flag and her commerce, encircles the globe. Her idiom is the universal language of the world. Her scientific inventions are the commonplace marvels of Eskimo and Hottentot alike. And over-shadowing all this is the monster-miracle of her atomic bomb.

And yet there is a growing, deep-rooted fear that America in her hour of triumph has struck the knell of failure; that somehow she has lost her sense of direction. Where is she going now?

We do not need the statistical evidence marshalled by P. A. Sorokin to prove our increasing paucity of qualitative creativeness in the fields of art, philosophy, and social science, nor the warning of Arnold J. Toynbee that we show the symptoms of a civilization on the threshold of disintegration. The proof is manifest everywhere. Americanization has become synonymous with vulgarization and standardization. Our insane asylums are increasingly overcrowded. We are a people ill with a neurosis of anxiety and discontent.

So it is that these basic differences of principle are not only juxtaposed today without regard for spatial boundaries and the continuity of the time-scale, but they have reached the peak of intensity. And so it is that we find here within twenty miles of each other caciques watching Our Father Sun for their people with the same meditative absorption of Tibetan yogis and Aztec priests, and scientists measuring the cosmic energy of the sun in the disintegration of subatomic mesons. Each unintelligible to the other, antipathetic as the civilizations they represent, and irreconcilable as intuition and reason. And both facing the threat of disintegration.

Hence in this shrinking one-world on the threshold of the Atomic Age, America finds herself obligated to leadership over a half of the world whose culture, civilization, and principle of life she does not understand at all. And at the same time she feels incapable of understanding it.

Art is for us but an unnecessary luxury to be indulged in by the fortunate few. How then can we understand a people to whom it is the substance of human life? Our politics is basically the tool for preserving property rights. We cannot understand a country whose legislation is an expression of the primary regard for human rights. Our religion is sterile. The Church with its outmoded vestments, its theoretical preachments and emotional frigidity has lost all appeal to the average man. Yet so bound is he by its orthodox constraints that he

is either frightened or contemptuous of any other. In economics, science, in every field we are constricted within the rational limits of demonstrable theory and practical use. And all else outside constitutes a vast realm of the unknowable which we have dismissed with the arrogant assumption that it has no validity whatever—not only the intangible truths of art, blind faith, and mysticism, but the peoples who perceive them.

Yet within our boundaries of the rational known there exists as it were an island of the unknowable in the surviving tribes of our own Southwest. And it is for precisely the same reason that we have ignored and abhorred them so consistently throughout the whole history of the United States. Because the Indian-American psyche is also diametrically opposed to that of the Euro-American; because it is polarized to the instinctual and intuitive rather than to the rationalistic and mechanistic.

Such then is the monstrous paradox of America and the essential difference between the Indian-American and the Euro-American.

What is the meaning of such a monstrous paradox? Perhaps Jung has given us a clue in his assertion that the cause of every nervous breakdown can be traced directly to the lack of a sustaining faith.

America, having gained the world, is searching for her soul. Where can she find it: in ruined, outworn Europe, antipathetic Asia, undeveloped South America? Or here, embodied in her own earth, at the roots of her own ignored, submerged and only indigenous faith?

A line of painted men, naked but for breechcloths and moccasins, filing out into the plaza; dancing and singing to the low beat of a drum. What can America find in an unintelligible, outmoded, pagan ceremonial that can be reconciled to modern science, politics, and the atomic bomb?

It is pertinent to ask. And fortunately the answer may still be found—if we seek diligently, and if we make haste.

The culture of the Navajo and the Pueblo is cut from the same cloth as the ancient civilizations of America, the modern civilizations of Mexico and Latin America, and India and China. They relate us not only to that half of the modern world from which we are so peculiarly alienated, but also to that pre-Columbian America which is our own ancient submerged past.

Now of what does this strange "otherness" of the "savage" Indian and the "heathen" Chinese consist? Of precisely its insistence upon the

indomitable, emotional, and ultimate values that eternally imbue all nature and mankind, rather than upon the postulated, theoretical, and impermanent values of our ever-changing ideologies.

Like the Indian we too seek a meaning in the life about us. But first we postulate a God who in Genesis creates the world in six days and breathes life into matter. With the discovery of the laws of astronomy, geology, and biological evolution, the universe becomes instead a self-sufficient, well-oiled machine. Matter becomes inanimate. Man begins to assume control of the machine. Then the physicists, reducing matter to nothing but energy, break down the machine completely. The universe looms as an abstract mathematical formula. And now having lost our simple faith in God and our successive faiths in mechanistic and mathematical theories, we believe in nothing at all.

The Indian meanwhile has remained traditionally immune to all these changing ideologies. Like his ancient predecessors he still sees the universe as a living entity imbued with life by one divine source. And like the modern Buddhists he regards all its constituents—the living stones, the breathing mountains, the corn plant, the deer, and man—as bound together into an unbroken solidarity, an enduring continuity.

There is the mountain. There is man. One cannot exist without the other. Neither is real in itself. The physical, transitory aspects of both are images of spiritual counterparts which alone have enduring reality.

So physical man may alter the physical mountain by gutting it of ore. He may transmute this ore into gold currency, and by possessing this he may likewise change the manner of his own existence. But these changes in the life of physical mountain and physical man, being built upon the changing laws of science and economics, are also impermanent and illusionary.

The spiritual mountain and spiritual man remain unchanged, for they alone possess reality. Likewise the relationship between them is unbroken; for it is a part of that solidarity which binds all constituents of the universe into one living whole, a ceaseless continuity.

And so it is that these differences in principle may be equated; for temporal, rational man also contains within himself the intuition of the immortality of his spiritual self. But how?

The ancient Maya, brooding upon the nature of the eternal, developed a calendar more accurate than the one we use now. But they

failed to develop a simple plow, and perished for lack of corn to supply the growing population. The present plight of the Navajos is a national disgrace; the days of the Pueblos are numbered. Both, as cultural minority groups, are doomed. Not only because of our treatment of them, but because they too have failed to meet the challenge of modern rational demands.

The Euro-American in turn has fixed his attention solely upon the mechanics of life, ignoring its ultimate meaning. He has seen Greece and Rome fall, the crumbling of Western Europe. And now, concurrent with the development of atomic fission, we too have reached the climax of scientific rationalization.

Where do we go now?

The pendulum of cyclic change swings back and forth. But the evolution of mankind is continually upward in a great ascending spiral. So that there is no going back to blind, irrational faith. We can only swing back on a higher level; a level that overlooks, as it were, the tenets of our earliest beliefs in the light of our latest rationalized thought.

The Indians' belief that Our Father Sun was the divine source of all life is matched by our own. Our scientists too are sun-worshippers. The sun is the gravitational center of the Solar System. The speed of light which travels from it, 186,000 miles a second, is the one basic fact on which science builds all its knowledge. When cosmic rays from outer space hit air atoms, mesons are produced which live only two-millionths of a second and then disintegrate with a burst of energy—the cosmic energy produced by the sun and imbuing all matter with life. This is science's definition of the Sun-Father, the infinitely expanding radiance that gives life.

The belief that dancing brings rain has advanced from the "tom-tom stage" to practical experimentation. The General Electric Laboratories of America and the Australian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research are doing their dancing in the clouds with pellets of dry ice. The United States Signal Corps has contracted for more research. Dr. Irving Langmuir, Nobel Prize Winner, is figuring out other plans.

The Indian belief that inorganic matter has life is not so pagan and anthropomorphic today as yesterday. Radioactive carbon 14, which lives at least 5,000 years, has been found in minerals and every living creature alike, human beings included.

Indeed, like the Indians themselves, we are beginning to believe

that even matter does not exist as a permanent reality. Physicists have decided that it is mostly emptiness, with atomic nuclei scattered thinly through it like stars in space, and even that the nuclei aren't very solid.

Einstein with his famous mass-energy equation, $E = MC^2$, has proved that all matter is merely condensed energy. If we today can transmute matter into energy by mechanical means, why was it not possible for the ancient Pueblos to transmute their energy by dancing into matter—into rain, into growing corn?

Only by such far-fetched literary parallels, perhaps, can the significance of ancient man's intuitive ceremonial magic and modern man's rational magic of atomic fission yet be equated. But it is certain we have reached a verge. The two opposing principles on which they are based clearly point to a convergence. And at that convergence lies the new faith for which we are crying so desperately. A faith big enough to embrace all of mankind's experiences of the past, all our religious tenets, and all our scientific advances toward the future.

It would not be too great a coincidence if that faith were found here: here in this crucible of conflict where there exist side by side the vestiges of man's earliest faith in the abstract, and man's latest achievement in the concrete. Nor would it be implausible to establish here with The Hill, another City of Research devoted to the study of the meanings implicit in both. The time is past when we can rely solely upon the pragmatic. The time is here when we must accept—if we can and before it is too late—the evidence of the intuitive.